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## Top Aide to Casey at CIA Backs Gates Nomination

By a WALL STREET JOURNAL Staff Reporter

WASHINGTON — John McMahon, a former top Central Intelligence Agency officer with broad respect in Congress, said he will testify next week in support of Robert Gates's nomination as director of the CIA.

Mr. McMahon's support is a major boost for Mr. Gates, whose credibility with lawmakers suffers as a result of his performance as deputy director during the Iran-Contra scandal in 1986. "It's very plausible that Gates didn't know what was going on," said Mr. McMahon, who had held the same post under Director William Casey. "I think he's pretty clean on this. I'm going to push for Gates."

Among major CIA veterans, few have the same standing in Congress as Mr. McMahon, who preserved close ties with senior lawmakers even as he served in the stormy period of covert action in the early 1980s. His forceful image presents a striking contrast to Mr. Gates's failure to more aggressively pursue warnings of the Iran-Contra operation.

Mr. McMahon defends Mr. Gates in large part because the Iran-Contra operation was run more from the White House than from the CIA. But his broader account of the deputy's job is at odds with those who now argue that Mr. Casey so compartmentalized information that he prevented his deputies from knowing what was going on in the agency.

A former special assistant to Mr. Casey, now posted overseas by the CIA, has been interviewed by the Senate Intelligence Committee in regard to Mr. Casey's administrative style. But Mr. McMahon said again yesterday: "We had a swinging door between us. I knew everything I wanted to know."

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